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FROM

Rev. J. Walker

Richardson, Mrs. E. (F). 1832.

O

ECCLESIASTICAL PROCEEDINGS

AGAINST

MRS EMILY RICHARDSON.

A

STATEMENT OF PROCEEDINGS,

AGAINST

(Farrington)

MRS EMILY RICHARDSON,

IN THE

SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

IN

READING.

CHARLESTOWN:
WILLIAM W. WHEILDON.
1832.

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TO THE READER.

SOMETIME last summer, MRS EMILY RICHARDSON requested to be admitted to the communion in the Second Congregational Church in this place. She stated that she had been the subject of some ecclesiastical proceedings as a member of the second church in Reading, a copy of the record of which, though she had repeatedly and earnestly requested it, she had never been able to obtain. At her instance, the following letter was written :

Charlestown, July 1st, 1831.

Dear Sir,—Mrs Emily Richardson, who has resided in this town about three years, and sustained, I believe, during that time, a good character, has expressed a wish to become a communicant in the church of which I am Pastor. She informs me that she has been the subject of some ecclesiastical proceedings in your church, which originated in her being understood to deny the supreme divinity of Jesus Christ. The result of these proceedings, she says, has not been communicated to her *in writing* ; but she informs me that you gave her to understand, that she was *not excommunicated*, but only that your particular church had withdrawn from her its christian watch and fellowship. Of this, however, she allows that she has *no evidence*, no person being present when you informed her of the decision of the church ; and the nature of the decision has, I understand, been differently represented. In a sincere desire to avoid all mistakes and misapprehensions, and not to violate the order of the churches, I take the liberty to request you to advise me by the earliest opportunity, whether

the ecclesiastical proceedings against Mrs Richardson originated in her denial of the supreme divinity of Jesus Christ ; whether any charges against her moral or religious character were made and sustained, excepting as regards what may have been thought to be implied in her peculiar faith, or in her refusing or neglecting to appear before the church to answer for the same ; whether she has, or has not, in fact, been excommunicated from the church of which you are Pastor, and if she has not been excommunicated, what is the precise nature of the censures which have been passed upon her, and what is supposed by you to be the precise nature of the relation which she now sustains towards your church, or towards the church in general.

Information on these points, given either in the words of your votes, or otherwise, as you may see fit, will enable our church to proceed understandingly on the application that has been made to us by Mrs Richardson ; and also to observe as we wish to do, the rules of Congregational order.

By attending to this request and answering this note, as soon as your convenience will possibly permit, you will much oblige our church and myself.

Though personally a stranger, permit me to subscribe myself yours, in Christian love,

JAMES WALKER.

Rev JARED REID,
Reading, Mass.

To this letter the following answer was received, which is here copied entire :

Reading 6 *July*, 1831.

This church has withdrawn all christian watch and fellowship from Mrs Emily Richardson. Of this she has been duly and officially notified. The offence was her violation of her own covenant vows, and her

departure from what we consider the faith once delivered to the saints.

Respectfully,

JARED REID.

Rev JAMES WALKER.

This answer, it will be perceived, did not give the information that had been asked. It did not state whether the church in Reading regarded Mrs Richardson as an excommunicated person, nor whether they had any charges against her character except those which they might think were implied in the change of her opinions, or in her conduct towards the church respecting this change.

She then submitted to this church a written account of the proceedings of which she had been the subject, so far as those proceedings had come to her knowledge. The paper was read at a regular meeting of the brethren of the church, and a wish was expressed unanimously that the same might be printed, if her consent could be obtained. This wish being communicated to her, she replied as follows :

Rev Sir—

* * * * * *

In regard to the request of your church concerning my book, I have consulted Mr Richardson's wishes, and he seems reluctant to my being exposed to the arrows of a malicious foe that may be aimed at me on all sides, and sometimes perhaps from an unknown hand, that it would be impossible to stay ; and I think it would be unadvisable, unless your church have something in their own hands to defend me with. Mr Richardson has authorised me to say, that, on condition that your church will be at the trouble to ascertain from good authority, what my character was while I resided in Reading, and if they can gain satisfactory evidence that it

was good, they have his full and free consent, together with my own, to publish it. In regard to the truth of my statement of Mr Reid's proceedings, if your church desire it, I am ready at any time, before any Justice that they will bring to me, to say on oath, that I have not exaggerated or misrepresented the story in the least. I have given it in the exact language in which it was spoken, as near as I can possibly recollect. Some of it was written as soon as Mr Reid was gone from the house, and all of it while it was fresh in my memory.— I was born in obscurity, and brought up in retirement, and for three years past, I have been almost entirely excluded from society. But it is not because I wish to make a greater noise, and bring myself into notice, that I consent to have my book published: but I wish to come forward and tell my story for a number of reasons, and then I shall very gladly step back to my former retirement and sink into oblivion. I wish this story to be published because your church have requested that it should be, and I should be happy to oblige them. I wish it to be published that all of Mr Reid's church may know how I have been treated, and how they have been treated; I wish them to know that two letters have been prepared by me expressly for them, one of which I know that Mr Reid refused to communicate to them, and I cannot learn that the other has shared a better fate. I wish it to be published because I believe it to be a duty that I owe to the public and myself; —to the public, because I think such wicked works of darkness ought to be brought to light, that people may prepare to use suitable measures against them, —to myself, because Mr Reid has furnished the means to destroy my reputation, and has driven me out into the world without giving me the means to defend it. He has by violence wrested from me my right to the christian ordinances that I ought to hold in common with all sincere believ-

ers in the christian religion, and I never should have regained it, if I had set down quietly and said nothing. I think Mr Reid may blame himself and not me, if my account of his proceedings should be published, for if he had answered my first, second, or third letter, it is not probable that this account would ever have come before your church, and of course would not have been published. * * * * *

If you will be so kind as to communicate to your church such parts of this letter, and only such, as you see fit, you will oblige your humble friend,

EMILY RICHARDSON.

September 2, 1831.

Abundant and perfectly satisfactory testimonials were easily obtained of Mrs Richardson's unimpeachable moral and religious character. The following passages are taken from a letter, written by a gentleman of great respectability in answer to some inquiries on this subject.

"Your letter has been duly received, and I have delayed writing a few days in order to make some further enquiries in relation to the character of Mrs Richardson. Her maiden name was Emily Farrington. Her parents, as I have been informed, died when she was quite young. Having some relations in Reading, she came to this place while a child, or when very young, and lived in one place and another till she married Mr Richardson. Her character, as far as I can learn from those well acquainted with her, was very good. Indeed I have not been able to find any one who has cast the least reproach upon her. In the year 1809, 10, or 11, there was in Mr Sanborn's Parish an excitement, called a religious revival. She was then about 14 or 15 years of age, and among others became a convert to the religion of the time, and joined Mr Sanborn's Church, and

remained a member thereof till dealt with by the Church and the Rev Mr Reid, as she has related to you. With regard to the steps or means by which she became a convert to her present views of religion, I know nothing. I believe, however, it was effected by her own intelligence and a candid enquiry into the real meaning of the scriptures.

"You ask me whether I 'know any thing either personally or by hearsay, which would make it unadvisable to print Mrs Richardson's statement ever, or at this particular time.' I can truly say that I know not any thing personally or by hearsay, which would render it unnecessary to print it. The common opinion here is, that her character for veracity is unimpeachable, and her moral character irreproachable. I apprehend that if her statement was published with some suitable comments on the unkind treatment she has received, written in a christian spirit, it would prove very salutary in this place, and there are many who would rejoice to have it done."

Her circumstances, as she intimates herself, are, and have been from the beginning adverse, and were for a time, owing to the sickness of Mr Richardson, almost desperate. The success with which, under these circumstances, she has cultivated her mind, and the seriousness and assiduity with which she has read her Bible, will appear from her narrative, which is printed without the alteration of a word or letter as it came from her mind and pen. Her constitution, always feeble, has for some years been a prey to pulmonary complaints, which at this moment confine her to the house, and make it not improbable that she will never leave it again.

As Mrs Richardson has stated her reasons for consenting to the publication of her account, it may be well

here briefly to intimate some of those which induced this church to request it. They wished that every member of the church in Reading might know what had been done in their name and under their authority to a feeble, unoffending and helpless woman. They wished that the public might know, when they are told that the members of exclusive orthodox churches are considered by their fellow communicants as *morally* free to change their religions opinions, that they are told what IS NOT TRUE. They wished that the members of exclusive orthodox societies might know, that if in a moment of excitement they join the church, and assent to a creed-covenant, and afterwards from a further examination of the Scriptures, see cause to alter their religious opinions, they will be likely, *if poor and unprotected like Mrs Richardson*, to be charged in the coarsest language with PERJURY, and be treated in most respects as if they had really committed that crime. They could not, moreover, repress their indignation at the outrage, as they conceived it, committed on the feelings and rights of a female, whose character is the opposite of obtrusiveness or officiousness,--committed too in the darkest hour of her adversity, when her husband was slowly recovering from a paralytic affection that had prostrated both body and mind, and her children were almost literally crying for bread, she, meanwhile, having no near relation or friend on earth to whom she could look for countenance or protection. Under these circumstances, even if her Christian *brethren* had succeeded in breaking down her spirit, and converting her to their purposes, it would have been an inglorious triumph. That they attempted it and failed, is a fact which ought to be known, especially as in this case a careful record, made at the time, has been kept of what was done, and not a shadow of doubt can be entertained of the accuracy of the statements.

This church have been actuated by no personal feelings or considerations against the individuals who are named in the following statement. Perhaps it is no more than what is often done in orthodox churches ; or than what they think is right. LET THE PUBLIC JUDGE.

Published by a Committee of the Second Congregational Church in Charlestown.

Charlestown, Dec. 28, 1831.

STATEMENT.

Respected Friend,

As I have promised to give you a correct statement of the proceedings of the Second Church in Reading, in order to convince me of my supposed errors in my religious opinions, I will now perform my painful task. You will not be surprised that I say painful, when you read what is to follow.

I think that it was sometime in September, 1827, that Mr Edmund Nichols called on me the first time. I was not much acquainted with him. I thought him to be a well meaning, though not well informed man, and was willing to pardon what I thought amiss. He said something to me about my being so long absent from the communion table. I told him I had been feeble a long time, and the services were so long that I did not feel able to go. This is all of the conversation between us at that time, that I can recollect. I did not once think of it as a serious affair; it was not my wish to injure the feelings of any one, I therefore intended to be present at the next communion.

Mr Nichols called soon after and requested to speak with me alone. His request was granted.

"Well, sister Richardson," said he, "I have called to converse with you on the subject of religion again, and to ask you if you are willing to make an acknowledgement to the Church, and sit down with us next Lord's Day?"

"Mr Nichols, I do not know that I have given any offence, and am not prepared to do that."

"I understand you have forsaken our house of worship."

"I was there the sabbath before last."

"Have you not been to the Unitarian meeting ?"

"Yes, a few times."

"Do you believe the gospel is preached there ?"

"I have heard some very good discourses in that meeting house."

"Do you believe Christ is a created being ?"

"Yes, for my Bible tells me he was 'the beginning of the creation of God.'"

"Are you willing to trust the salvation of your soul on a created being ?"

"I am willing to trust in whatever way God has appointed for salvation."

"If Christ is a created being, he is no Saviour for me ; but I do not believe he is, I believe he is God."

"Do you believe God died ?"

"No ; it was his human nature."

"Do you believe God has human nature ?"

"He is both God and man."

"I do not see how that can be."

Mr Nichols said, "it is easy enough," and tried to prove it by a comparison too absurd, ridiculous, and indelicate, to be inserted here. In the course of conversation he compared me to Simon the Sorcerer, but did not tell how that applied to me. He said I had broken my covenant engagements, and then read the covenant of the church which was as follows :

"You do now in the presence of the Omnicient God, your Judge, before this assembly as your witnesses, solemnly avouch the Lord Jehovah, the everlasting God, to be your God and portion forever. In particular, you take God the Father to be your father, cordially acquiescing in his authority, law and government. You take God the Son for your only mediator, surety and in-

tercessor, receiving him as a prophet to instruct, a priest to atone, and a king to rule in and to reign over you. You take the Holy Ghost to be your sanctifier, guide and comforter, always avoiding everything which will provoke him to withdraw from you. You do give up yourself and all you have unto this one God in three persons forever, to be his, without any exception, reserve, or limitation. You believe the holy scriptures to be the infallible word of God, and do take them for your only rule of faith and practice, and by the aid of divine grace promise not to be turned about by every wind of doctrine.

"With contrition of heart, you profess repentance of all your sins, sincerely turning from them, with all your heart, loathing and abhorring them for their own vile nature. You profess faith unfeigned in the rich grace of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, depending wholly upon his obedience and suffering, for pardon and sanctification, and eternal life. You profess a love to, and delight in God, his word, house, sabbaths, and heavenly kingdom. You profess good will to all men, more especially to the household of faith, ever cultivating a forgiving temper toward all offenders, even personal enemies, always carefully avoiding all sinful occasions of offence, towards those within and those without. You profess to watch and pray against all sins in yourself, secret and open, and to abstain from all appearances of evil, aiming at the glory of God in all things, and pressing on towards perfection in holiness. You believe this church to be a true, visible church of Jesus Christ, wherein his word, ordinances, and discipline, are truly and regularly administered. You promise to submit to the ordinance and discipline of the same, agreeably to the word of God. In a word, you promise to walk in a constant obedience to all God's commands and ordinances, blameless, so long as you shall continue your abode

with us, and until your life shall end. All this you solemnly promise to perform, with entire dependance on the grace and strength of the Lord Jesus Christ, to enable you."

"Mrs Richardson," said Mr Nichols, "do you assent to this covenant?"

"To some parts of it I certainly do not."

By this time Mr Richardson had taken a seat with us. "Well, brother Richardson, are you willing to say you have taken a false oath? Sister Richardson says she has."

"What do you say, Mr Nichols?"

"I say you have taken a false oath by signing the covenant. I do not think you would have gone so far astray if you had been attended to, but do not wish you to think yourself excusable on that account. I hope you will forgive me for so long neglecting you. I have come in a kind, friendly, brotherly manner, and hope you will believe my visit was so intended."

"If you have anything more to say to me, I will thank you to communicate it to me in writing, and I will answer you in the same way."

Sometime after, he called again, accompanied by Deacon Wakefield and Deacon Parker.

"I have called again, Sister Richardson, to converse with you on the subject of religion."

"Did I not request you to write, if you had anything more to say?"

"I have asked some of the brethren about it, and they think it will be contrary to the scripture rule."

I asked the Deacons if they thought it would be improper for this business to be done in writing? They said, "No; if both parties are agreed." I had heard enough of Mr Nichols's arguments and comparisons, when he last visited me, and therefore said very little to him, and the Deacons said very little to me. Deacon

Wakefield asked me if I believed Christ to be God. I said "No ; I do not." There was something said about my absenting myself from the communion table. I mentioned my ill health as a reason. To which the Deacons replied, "If you say you were unable to attend, we have nothing to say ; you are accountable to none but your God." At my request, Deacon Wakefield offered a short prayer, and we parted.

Soon after, Mr Nichols presented me with the following charge and summons.

"Having taken the first and second steps with you, in order to convince you of your error, and bring you to a better state of mind, and having utterly failed to accomplish an end so important to yourself and to the church of Christ in this place, I am under the painful necessity of telling the matter to the Church. I therefore present you with the following charge, viz.

"The direct and unqualified denial of the supream divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

"I here notify you to appear and answer to this charge before the Church, on Thursday next, on the 20th instant of Dec. at two o'clock in the afternoon, at Union Hall. EDMUND NICHOLS."

A town or parish hall I thought to be a very improper place for me to appear at, on such an occasion. I expected that I should be called on to speak ; and to hear a woman speak before so many gentlemen, in so public a place, would have been to me truly disgusting. Besides, some of the church advised me not to go, and said, they did not think it was generally expected that I should.

Soon after the meeting I heard that many of the church were greatly dissatisfied because I did not attend, as they were desirous of hearing from me, what my

belief of Christ was. I was perfectly willing, and should have been pleased to have given them all the information and satisfaction I reasonably could. I therefore prepared a letter for the Church, in which I made a statement of my belief. I was informed that Mr Reid, with Deacon Temple and Deacon Wakefield, were appointed a committee to visit me, and it was my intention to present my letter to Mr Reid, to be communicated to the church by him; for I did not once think of its being refused, neither did I think he had a right to withhold it from the church; but he soon let me know he had rights that I had never thought of.

In about four weeks the committee called on me, accompanied by Deacon Parker. I believe that I received them with all due respect. Mr Reid mentioned the charge brought against me by Mr Nichols, and added, "you have imbibed, and in some measure propagated pernicious sentiments." I was beginning to speak, to ask where I had propagated pernicious sentiments; but Mr Reid interrupted me by saying, "We will, before we proceed, look for direction by prayer, with your leave." To this I did not object. The prayer was offered by the Rev Mr Reid.

An uninformed spectator of this scene might very reasonably have supposed that these grave gentlemen on their knees, apparently in fervent prayer for the criminal before them, were greatly interested in her welfare, and that she had committed murder, and was just going to be executed.

As soon as we were seated, I asked Mr Reid where I had propagated pernicious sentiments?

"I did not say you had."

"You certainly did."

"I did not. I will leave it to these gentlemen. Did I say Mrs Richardson had propagated pernicious sentiments?"

The answer was, "no, I think not. She must have received this impression from the prayer." I was silenced by numbers, but not satisfied.

Mr Reid said, "I have come to converse freely with you, and what I say, I would wish to say with reference to the judgment, and in the fear of God, and I wish you to do the same." This he repeated a number of times, in the most solemn and terrific tone. He then went on to tell me with how much neglect I had treated the church, by not attending the church meeting.

"I did not," was my reply, "do it, thinking to treat the church with neglect."

"I am surprised, Mrs Richardson, that you should say, you did not think of treating the church with neglect, when a meeting was appointed for you, and you had suitable notice, and did not attend."

These meetings were stated, and held once in fourteen days, unless something special prevented. They were called church prayer meetings, and if there is any church business to be attended to, it is done at these meetings.

"I expected the church would send a committee to converse with me, and what I say to you is the same, I suppose, as if I said it to the church. Besides, I have written a letter to them, that I should like to have you take. It will be the same as if I was there."

"I do not wish to see it."

"I should like to have you look at it."

"No, I do not wish to see it."

But seeing I intended to produce the letter, he repeated his words a number of times, and finally said, "I will not look at it, if you do get it."

"It is possible some of the gentlemen will like to look at it."

I offered it to Deacon Temple. "No, I have no notion of entering into a paper war with you." I offered it to

the other two. They both refused it. I then sat down very peaceably. One of them I believe thought it disgraceful to treat me as they did. He said to me, "If you can read what you have to say better than you can speak it, you can read it yourself." It is evident he was willing to hear it, but did not dare to read it, after his minister had refused.

"It may be Mr Reid will object to hearing it read."

"I will hear it on condition that I may interrupt you when I please, and ask you the meaning of what you read. I will hear it on no other terms."

To this I made no reply, but proceeded to read my letter. The following is a copy of it.

READING, DEC. 22, 1827.

To the Church in Reading, under the pastoral care of the Rev. Jared Reid, I present my best wishes. Believing it to be important that you should have a correct statement of my belief, I send you the following lines. I believe there is one God, and only one, who is self-existent, and is the ruler and upholder of all things. I believe there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. I believe him to be the Son of God, the true Messiah, of whom Moses and the prophets did write. I believe him to be a man approved of God, by miracles, and signs, and wonders, which God did by him, and that God gave unto him his spirit without measure. I believe that he is appointed of God to be a Saviour to as many as believe his word. I believe him to be one in his Father, in the same sense he wished his disciples to be one in him; which I think can be no more than one in design, both aiming at the same, the glory of God the Father, and the good of men. I believe that God will judge the world by Christ, and that he will reign until all things shall be subdued unto him, and that he will then deliver up the kingdom to God the

Father, and the Son will be subject unto God, that God may be all and all. This is my firm belief respecting God and his son Jesus Christ.

I would now wish to ask you if you can, agreeably to the word of God, deprive me of the privileges of the church? Have I not, in the above lines, acknowledged all that Christ or his Apostles exacted of their converts? When our Lord asked his disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God. And Jesus said, blessed art thou, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto you, but my Father which is in heaven." When Philip had explained the scripture to the eunuch, he wished to be baptised, "Philip said to him, if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. He answered, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." We have no intimation that he said anything more. Philip baptised him.

Now after having made this statement of my belief, I will endeavor to submit patiently, to what you may think fit to do with me, hoping and praying, that you may be directed by the word of God.

Yours affectionately,

EMILY RICHARDSON.

When I read, "I believe that Christ is the Son of God," Mr Reid said, "What do you mean by *son*?"

"I mean *son*."

"What do you mean by son?"

"I mean the Messiah."

"What do you mean by Messiah?"

"I mean the anointed."

"What do you mean by the anointed?"

"I mean the chosen of the Lord."

"What do you mean by the chosen of the Lord?"

"I have given you all the explanation of the word that is necessary, and shall say nothing more."

"You have begun at son, and gone all around and made out nothing."

This was well calculated to intimidate, and damp the feelings of a female, situated as I was with these four men, and no one to speak a word for me. However, I read my letter without being interrupted again.

"Mrs Richardson, it is very strange that you should think of this business being done by writing, it is an unheard of thing. You ought to have attended the church meeting. If you did not know what you ought to do, you should have asked me, or some one capable of giving you advice."

"I did ask, and was advised not to go."

"Who advised you not to go?"

"I do not like to tell. It was one of the church."

"If one of the brethren have advised you so, I have a right to know."

"If it had been one of the brethren, it is possible that I should tell you; but it was one of the sisters, and I do not like to tell."

"Have you made it a subject of much prayer, to know if you should attend the church meeting?"

"No; I did not think any one would expect me there. How do you think I could, a lone female, stand before that assembly and answer questions to any or all that should be disposed to ask, knowing they were all against me?"

"I should think by what I have seen of you this evening, that you could go there and say anything necessary to be said."

"Have you seen anything in me like unbecoming boldness?"

"No, I do not mean so, I only mean what I say. As you have taken the liberty to think differently from us, and from what you once thought, I have a right to demand, and shall expect, an answer to the questions I

shall ask you. Have you conversed with any Unitarians, in this or any other place, respecting the divinity of Christ? Have you conversed with any Unitarian minister? Have you read their books, or publications, or been conversant with those who have read them?"

"I know there are many reports circulating that are calculated to prejudice your mind against me; but I will answer your questions candidly, and I wish you to believe what I am going to say."

"I have never detected you in a falsehood, and am bound to believe you."

"I have never conversed with any Unitarian on this subject. I have never spoken with a Unitarian minister, knowingly, in my life. I never read one of their books till since I lived in this house, (eighteen months,) and my belief was fixed long before. I have not knowingly conversed with any who have read their books. The first I ever saw was three or four of Mr Norton's sermons, (of Weymouth.) I have since read Mr Whitman's discourse, ('On denying the Lord Jesus,') and do not recollect any other. I have carefully studied my Bible, for some years, and have taken my belief from that."

"If you have taken this your belief from the Bible, I have a right to demand of you the meaning of any text I please, and give you this to begin with. 'The word was with God, and the word was God, and the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.' When you have explained this, I have more ready for you."

"I can explain this to my own satisfaction; but I do not expect to satisfy you."

"I have a right to demand, and shall expect an explanation from you."

This he repeated a number of times. Being determined that I would not explain to, or reason with, a man that I thought had acted so unreasonable a part,

believing also, that all I said would be turned into ridicule, as my letter had been, I at last said, "Mr Reid, I am surprised; I really thought you had come here to explain the Bible to me, and free my mind from doubts, if there were any existing. I did not know I was to explain the Bible to my minister."

In the course of conversation he said, "Christ had two natures."

"Please to point out to me a place in the Bible where I can read this."

"What if I do not give you the exact language of scripture? I give you the meaning, and that is sufficient. I did not come here to quibble. You are cavilling. You make me think of a lawyer. You are acting the part of a philosopher."

Once he attempted to prove that Christ is God, by saying, "He took upon him our nature."

"Does the Bible say he had any other nature?"

Then I was compared to a lawyer and a philosopher again.

"Mr Reid, do you think, that if I can love God with all my heart, and my neighbor as myself, the question will be asked me in the day of judgment, if I believe that Christ had two natures?"

"Mrs Richardson, I am surprised to see with how much levity you treat the subject. You talk of loving God, with all your heart, that have no just views of Christ."

For two hours he went on in this way, and in telling me with how much neglect I had treated the church, and what he had a right to demand. He would occasionally say to the deacons, "I do not wish to engross the whole time." They said, "we are willing you should on this occasion." They said but little to me more than to tell me occasionally, that their pastor had spoken their feelings..

"Mrs Richardson," said Mr Reid, "you are in a very critical situation. I have never witnessed any case so alarming since my connection with this church. You will say you are not to be dismissed for immoral conduct, and so say I; but you are in a fearful situation. To dismiss one of our members without any charge against her moral character, would be very sensibly felt by the church as a body."

"I should think it a hard case."

"If you are dismissed, I shall not be surprised to hear, before five years, that you have gone any lengths, that you have become a confirmed infidel, and denied the whole Bible. You have taken infidel ground already. You have forsworn yourself. You come at one time, and tell us you believe one thing, you now say you believe something else, and it is likely enough you will, by and by, tell us you believe something different from this; and how do we know where to find you?"

Before he left me he said, "I am willing to do any thing for you I can. There is no labor that I am not willing to bestow upon you. If you were my own sister, my own dear flesh and blood, I could do no more for you, than I am willing to do now." To all this I said nothing, though I believe I understood this manner of address, and any one might if he would compare the former part of Mr Reid's discourse with the latter. At first, I believe he was trying to terrify me by his questions, and haughty unauthorized demands. He then attempted to work on my feelings in a milder way. I was not terrified by the former; neither was I affected by the latter. They were with me from seven o'clock until ten. One of the Deacons said, he thought it best to adjourn the meeting, as it was late. They looked at me, as if they would like to hear what I would say, but I was silent.

"Should you like," said Mr Reid, "to have us wait on you longer and call again ?"

"I will leave it for you to say."

With this answer I believe he was not well pleased. He looked on me with a stern countenance, and said, "I think it would have been becoming in you, to have requested us to wait on you longer, and call again. Instead of that I should say you were willing to be dismissed ;—nay, I should think you desired it."

"If you have any arguments that you think are calculated to convince me, and have not time to bring them forward now, I should like to have you call again."

We had prayers and parted.

Some of the church informed me that Mr Reid had requested all of them to visit me as they had an opportunity, and I really began to think that his request was to be granted to the letter, for I never knew when I could call my time my own, I had so many calls. I am fond of company, but do not like always to be accosted with, "Well, sister, are your views and feelings the same as they have been ?" and then a long lamentation, as if I had done some dreadful thing. I could have no peace, unless I turned hypocrite, and that I did not choose to do, I therefore made up my mind to leave the place, and on the 10th of April 1828, I removed with my family to Charlestown. Here I had rest, until some time in May, when I received the following note.

READING, 16th May, 1828.

Mrs Richardson,

The church will proceed to consider your case on Thursday, the twenty second day of May, and notwithstanding you have hitherto treated all their calls with entire neglect, they are disposed to extend to you an invitation to be present on the above named twenty second of the current month, and either satisfy them by

your confession, or show reason, if any you have, why they should not withdraw from you their Christian watch and fellowship.

In behalf of the church.

JARED REID, *Pastor and Clerk.*

Mrs Emily Richardson."

Sometime in June, Deacon Parker called on me to let me know, that Deacon Wakefield and himself had been appointed a committee to visit me, and inform me that they had taken a wrong step. He said, "The summons for you to attend the church meeting ought to have been from the church, and not from an individual. The church have directed me to request you to attend a church meeting next Thursday, and they will bear your expenses."

I supposed that they intended to give all up that they had done, and begin again. In July I received the following note.

"Mrs Richardson,

As brother Nichols was not present at our last church meeting, your case was not considered. The church voted to attend to it on Thursday, the 17th of the present month; the meeting will be at Union Hall, to commence at two o'clock, in the afternoon. I am directed to signify to you, that it is both the choice and pleasure of the church, that you should then and there attend, to answer to the charge brought against you by the above mentioned brother. The charge I need not specify, as you have already been furnished with a copy of it.

Yours &c. &c.

JARED REID, *Chh. Clerk.*

Mrs Emily Richardson.

Reading, 8th July, 1828."

I did not feel at all disposed to go, after the cruel and

unmerciful treatment I had received from them. The 8th of October, Mr Reid and Mr Daniel Nichols called on me, and said that they with Deacon Pratt, were appointed a committee to visit me. Mr Reid said to me, "What we say, I wish you to understand as the voice of the church. I wish you likewise to understand it as the first admonition."

"What shall I call all before this ?"

"Call it what you please. This is the first admonition, and the last letter you received from me, the first summons from the church. Are your views the same as they have been ?"

"I know of no particular alteration."

"Do you not think yourself under covenant obligations to us, and to your God ? When you took the covenant upon you, you had arrived at years of discretion ; you was, I think, fourteen."

"That was my age. But I do not think a child of fourteen can possibly understand such a covenant ; and now I am older, if my Bible and my conscience tell me I was wrong, I have an undoubted right to alter my opinion."

"You plead conscience, but that is not always a sure guide. Do you not think that you have made great trouble for the church ?"

"No, I have made trouble for no one, they have taken it on themselves, and made trouble for me."

"If I should ask you to give me an explanation of some texts such as 'the word was with God, and the word was God,' would you answer me as you did before, by telling me you did not know you was to explain the Bible to your minister, when I gave you my opinion and requested yours?" He should have said "*demanded* yours."

"I do not know what I could say besides. I really think you ought to explain the Bible to me, and free my mind from doubts, if there be any."

"You are not willing to be convinced."

"I believe I am willing, if it can be done in a reasonable and right way."

"What do you mean by *right* ?"

"I mean right; that there should be nothing wrong."

"You evade answering my question. You have neglected to hear the church, and you must know that they must withdraw from you their fellowship, for obstinacy, if there was nothing more."

"I have always heard them attentively, whenever they have called, and am I to be dismissed for obstinacy ?"

"Do not say dismissed."

"I will take it back and say excommunicated."

"It can be nothing better. I cannot wish God speed to damnable heresy."

"Do you call my offence 'damnable heresy ?'"

"I do."

"Does not the chapter you allude to, speak of their consciences accusing them ?"

"I allude to no particular place, but the whole Bible."

"Am I to be excommunicated for obstinacy ?"

"It will be soon enough for you to know, when the church see fit to tell you. Mrs Richardson, I do fear for you, when I think of the lives of excommunicated persons. Your case is a very alarming one."

"It is a very singular one. I have heard of persons being excommunicated, and on account of their religious opinions, too ; but never heard of a case being managed exactly like this."

"It is of no use to talk with you, you manifest the same disposition you did, when I last visited you."

"Did I manifest a bad disposition ?"

"Yes, you treated the subject with levity. I must say as I did before, you make me think of a lawyer. I wish you to make this business the subject of daily prayer."

"There is no one thing that occupies my mind so much."

"You say there is no one thing that occupies your mind so much ; but do you pray ?"

"I cannot say I do not."

"Do you enter your closet and pray daily ?"

"I do not like to hear people boast of their prayers, and never allow myself to do it."

"You are at liberty to answer my question, or not."

"If delicacy did not forbid my answering such a question, surely my Bible does ; for anything we are to do so privately as to enter our closet and shut the door, is not to be told of as soon as we get out."

"You may be sure," continued Mr Reid, "you have my prayers. You have the prayers and tears of the church. Their hearts bleed for you. There is nothing that would give them so much joy as your conversion. There is nothing that would so much rejoice my heart, beside the conversion of my father, as to see you return to the bosom of the church. Were you my mother, or my sister, I could do no more for you than I am willing to do now. There is no labor I would not bestow on you, if it was of any use. Brother Nichols, there is an opportunity for you to speak if you wish to add anything."

"I do not know that I can add anything to what Mr Reid has said, more than to tell you how much the church is grieved on your account, and it would greatly rejoice their hearts to hear of your conversion."

The 5th of November Mr Reid called again, accompanied by Mr Charles Temple. Mr Reid said, "We are sent by the church, as a committee to visit you. Do you hold the same mind you did when I was last here ?"

"I believe I do."

"How is it possible, Mrs Richardson, educated as you have been, that you can believe what you say you do ?"

This he said no doubt, because he knew I was brought up with the most rigid Orthodox people, and my whole circle of acquaintance were either Baptists, Methodists, or Congregational Calvinists.

"How can you explain this text, 'The word was with God, and the word was God.' "

"When I read a passage that is dark and obscure, I explain it by those that can be more easily understood."

"And is this the way you interpret scripture ? Must the Bible be made to bow to your understanding ? Must dark and obscure passages, as you call them, be explained by those more easily understood ?"

"I believe this to be the only sure way of interpreting scripture."

"And so the Bible must be all explained away."

"O no ; there is no need of that."

"Mrs Richardson, we shall see, before ten years, where you will land. We shall see, within ten years, where Unitarians will all land. We see where they are landing already. They are taking from the Bible one doctrine after another, until there will be nothing left, and we shall have no Bible. Mrs Richardson, I do pity you, how can you lie down or rise up with your perjured conscience. O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I could weep for you. When I signed for you your papers I had never seen you, though I pitied you. As soon as I saw you, I was interested in your welfare. When you was sick, I did tenderly sympathise with you, and since this sad business, I have had no feelings towards you but pity. I have not been angry with you, not at all."

"You have been very kind, and I sincerely thank you for it."

The papers alluded to above by Mr Reid, were a recommendation and subscription paper, drawn up and signed by Daniel Chute Esq. Signed likewise by the Rev. Mr Sanborn, Rev. Mr Reid, all of Reading, and Rev. Mr Green of Boston. From the time that I was thirteen years old, until I was twenty six, Reading had been my place of residence with the exception of a few months. The last five years of that time I had resided in the same house with Esq. Chute. In that time Mr Sanborn was dismissed from his pastoral labors in Reading, and Mr Green settled in his present place. Not long before Mr Green's settlement in Boston, I removed from Reading, and was absent some time after Mr Reid was ordained in that place. This is the reason why Mr Reid was not personally acquainted with me, at the time he was so kind as to sign my papers.

"This," said Mr Reid, "is the last visit that we shall make you."

"If this is the last visit that I am to expect, I hope that you will do me justice."

"We shall. We have gone on with you according to the scripture rule. Our path is now plain before us. You have neglected to hear the church, and we can do no otherwise than to withdraw from you our christian watch and fellowship. As a citizen of the world you may depend on my friendship, but as a minister of the gospel of Christ, I can do no otherwise than I do."

Mr Temple next addressed me. This was peculiarly trying to me. He is a gentleman that I very much respect, and his lady has been an intimate friend of mine. "I hope, cousin, that you do not think I have come here because I wish to reprove and censure you. I have been chosen by the church once before, and declined coming because my embarrassment was such. Had you formed your belief when Mrs Temple visited you, and found you reading some books that you said you

was reading only to hear what the author had to say?"

"I will answer you candidly, and I hope men will believe what I am going to say." This I said, because I knew that it was generally believed that I had embraced Unitarianism, in consequence of reading Unitarian books, and this is certainly false.

"Your veracity is not doubted in the least."

"I was not reading those books to form my belief, it was fixed long before. Besides, these books had nothing to do with Unitarianism. They were Mr Balfour's Inquiry, Mr Sabine's Lectures, and Mr Balfour's Reply. I had not then even read any Unitarian's writings."

"I have heard that you said, you did not think the covenant binding upon you at all, because you was so young that you did not understand it."

"It is true. I have said it, and do believe it."

"You were old enough to be allowed your oath, and to choose a guardian. You did take a covenant upon you next in importance and solemnity to the church covenant." He alluded to the marriage covenant.

"I was not married when I was fourteen, I was near seventeen."

"You were probably engaged to Mr Richardson, when you joined the church; and I believe that when we make such an engagement, we are bound in the sight of God, as much as we are when the ceremony is past."

"I had made no such engagement at that time."

Mr Temple gave me very good advice; and reminded me of the responsibility resting on me, in bringing up my children, in consequence of my husband's infirmity.

The twenty-fourth of December, Mr Reid called on me unaccompanied, and said, "I suppose you have

heard the result of our meeting, I do not know but you was in town."

"If you are speaking of the meeting, Thursday after Thanksgiving, I was in Reading."

"That is the one. I suppose you have heard what was done."

"I have heard that I was excommunicated."

"Not exactly so. As you have gone out from us, and neglected to hear the church, we thought best to withdraw from you our christian watch and fellowship."

"Mr Reid, I think I have been cruelly treated."

"That is your assertion. People think differently."

This I thought was as much as to say, I had no proof of it, and it would not be believed. Do you not think this a little aggravating, after they had so carefully avoided writing, although I had desired them to write, because I thought it would prevent all misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Mr Reid and his Deacons did so far condescend, when they made me their first visit, as to say, that if Mr Richardson wished to be present, they would not object. What a privilege! that my own husband, in his own hired house, should be permitted to sit in the room and hear me questioned, accused of false swearing, compared to a lawyer and a philosopher, by way of derision? But would this wonderful privilege have been granted, if my husband had been what he once was? They very well knew that I could have no help from him, for Mr Reid had visited him a number of times in his sickness, and saw that at that time he could not possibly convey his ideas.

What I have written, is a correct, though concise statement of their proceedings, so far as I have been informed. I have written three letters to Mr Reid, and one to the church, requesting them to send me a copy of all their proceedings, but they have not complied with my request. The following are copies of these letters.

"*Charlestown, Dec.* 30, 1830.

"REV. SIR,

I believe it is customary in all churches, at least in all that I am acquainted with, to inform in writing the person they have excommunicated, or dismissed in any way, of what they have done. I have received no such writing, and am at a loss to know in what relation to your church I stand. You will therefore greatly oblige me by sending me a copy of the church vote. As Pastor of the church, I suppose you are authorized to do this. Otherwise I must beg you to submit my request to the church, that they may act on it.—Yours,

EMILY RICHARDSON."

"REV. SIR,

I forwarded a letter to you dated Dec. 30, 1830, the object of which was to request you to send me a copy of the church vote for my dismission. As I have received no answer, it is possible my letter may not have reached you. I therefore trust you will pardon me for writing a second time. It is not to satisfy an idle curiosity that I have made this request, but because I believe and respect the christian religion. I believe likewise that it is the duty as well as privilege of all who possess the same views of the christian religion that I do, to manifest their respect for it, by uniting with some christian church. This I wish to do, but am at a loss to know how to proceed, until I know in what relation to your church I stand. One of your church members told me I was excommunicated. If I understood you right the last time you called on me, you said it was not exactly so. You will greatly oblige me therefore, by sending me a copy of the church vote, that I may judge for myself. Your friend,

EMILY RICHARDSON.

Charlestown, Feb. 9, 1831."

"*Charlestown, March* 10, 1831.

"REV. SIR,

I forwarded a letter to you last December, and another in February. In both of them I requested you to send me a copy of the church vote for my excommunication or dismission, and in the last, I gave you my reason for wishing it. I have received no answer to either of them, although I think you must have received one, if not both, before this time. It is certainly very cruel in you not to comply with my reasonable request, when I have condescended almost to beg of you what I believe I had a right to expect without asking for it, and what I believe to be absolutely necessary in order to ascertain what my present church relations are, and by what steps I am to gain admission again to the christian ordinances, and likewise to defend my reputation against the many slanders that may be circulated in consequence of my connection with your church being dissolved.

"But to allow me any kind of defence, seems to be no part of you plan. Yet I do once more respectfully request you, to send me a copy of the church vote for my dismission, and likewise to send me a copy from the church records of all your proceedings in regard to me. From what you have said to me, and from what I have heard from others, I have reason to believe you have been instrumental in depriving me of the society and confidence of my friends. You have said to me, "if you are dismissed from the church, I shall not be surprised to hear, before five years, that you have gone any lengths; that you have become a confirmed infidel and denied the whole Bible; you have taken infidel ground already." Such insinuations from you are well calculated to deprive me of the esteem and confidence of all with whom you have any influence. If I have not been misinformed, you have intimated in explaining the twelfth chapter of Matthew to your Bible class, that the

persons there spoken of that can never be forgiven, are those whom the churches see fit to excommunicate. I did not understand that you made any distinction between those excommunicated for the greatest immorality, and those excommunicated for an honest belief which they could not possibly avoid. I have reason to believe this report from what you have said to me, and from what I have heard some of your church say. You have said to me, "I fear for you, when I think of the lives of excommunicated persons." You have said likewise, that "what the apostles bound on earth was bound in heaven; that what they loosed on earth was loosed in heaven; and we have reason to believe it is much the same at the present day." If by this you wished me to believe, that if you shut me out from the privileges of the church, I must be shut out of heaven, I can tell you in reply, respectfully but firmly, that I believe no such thing. Your power to afflict me is limited, and must end with this life; and may I ever praise my Maker and my Redeemer, that you are not to be my final judge. Some of your church members have told me, that they did not think it possible for a Unitarian to go to heaven; and have said that they should never think of being intimate with, or even visiting one, though they would not withhold from him the customary compliments of the day.

"I do not wish you to suppose I have treasured up in my memory your cruel treatment of me, because I am your enemy, or wish you any ill. Far be such a thought from my heart. I remember your ill treatment of me, because it has grieved me, and because I feel the effect of it daily. How can you enjoy the society of your friends, when you have deprived me of mine? How can you rest on your pillow, when by your means my repose is disturbed? I should suppose my misfortunes would entitle me to your sympathy and kindness,

instead of insult and cruelty. At the time I was so unfortunate as to fall under your displeasure, I was, and had been for a long time in a feeble state of health. I had been deprived of the society of my husband by his illness ; I was poor and in want of many of the comforts of life. My children were forced from me by my inability to provide for them, and were placed with strangers, that I had never seen ; though I found them to be very good people, and I shall ever remember them with respect and gratitude for their kindness to me and mine. I do not write this because I suppose you were unacquainted with my circumstances, but because I wish you to look back, and see the impropriety of your conduct towards me. That you may profit by the retrospect, is the ardent desire of your sincere friend and well wisher,

EMILY RICHARDSON."

The following letter, inclosing that to the church, was addressed by me to the eldest deacon.

" *Charlestown, April* 14, 1831.

"SIR,

Please to pardon me for the liberty I have taken in addressing you ; the object of which is, respectfully to request you to communicate the following lines to the church, that they may act thereon.

EMILY RICHARDSON."

" *Charlestown, April* 14, 1831.

" To the second Church in Reading I present my best wishes, and respectfully request you to favor me with a copy of all your proceedings in regard to me. I believe I have a right to a copy of these proceedings according to the custom in such cases and the reason of things. Besides I am very desirous of once more being united to some christian church, thereby to manifest my love

and respect for the christian ordinances. I believe this to be the duty of every sincere believer in the christian religion. You will, I think, see that it is absolutely necessary that my request should be granted, as I cannot reasonably expect to gain admittance to any christian church, until I can shew satisfactory evidence why I have been shut out from yours. You will greatly oblige me by complying with my request, as soon as may be convenient. As my health is gradually declining, this season may be the last opportunity of being out that I shall have.

Affectionately yours,

EMILY RICHARDSON.

"P. S. I take the liberty of addressing you through your oldest Deacon, because though I have written three several times to your Pastor, I have not as yet been so happy as to receive from him the charity of an answer. Perhaps he has not received my letters, or perhaps he has not thought it worth his while to communicate, or notice in any way whatever, the letters of a poor, afflicted and dying woman. E. R."

I here end the narrative of my sufferings.

Yours respectfully,

EMILY RICHARDSON.

To —— ——

Charlestown, June 1, 1831.

NOTE BY THE COMMITTEE.

Mrs Richardson, for sufficient reasons as stated in her letter, declined giving Mr Reid a unitarian exposition of the passage in John, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God." As these reasons, however, do not operate on us, and as we happen to have left the necessary space, we shall favor him with two or three.—By the WORD, in this place, we understand *the divine power*

considered as in action;—"By the WORD of the Lord, the heavens were made" (Psalm xxxiii. 6.); "He SPAKE and it was done" (v. 9.). This power was "in the beginning"; i. e. in the beginning of creation. It was "with God"; i. e. belonged to him. And it "was God"; i. e. whatever was done by this power, was done by God. "All things were made by" this power. This "word was made flesh," when the divine power for which it stands, was communicated to Jesus Christ,—that divine power by which he wrought his miracles, and became in other respects miraculously endowed. "The father that dwelleth in me"—not the Son, the second person in the trinity, as in the trinitarian belief, but—"the Father that dwelleth in me, HE doeth the works" (John xiv. 10.); "For I have not spoken OF MYSELF, but the FATHER which sent me, he gave me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak" (Ib. xii. 49.).—Others give a different translation to the first verse, and one which the original will warrant: "The word was in the beginning, and the word was with God, and the word was *a* god." Jesus Christ was called "the word," just as in other places, "the way, the truth and the light." He was "in the beginning"; i. e. from the commencement of the gospel dispensation, as in John vi. 64. xv. 27, and in many other places. He was "with God"; i. e. in communion with him; and is called "a god," because they were "called gods to whom the word of God came." "All things were made, or done, by him"; i. e. all things pertaining to the new dispensation.—Others, again, understand by the WORD, in this place, a preexistent being, the "angel of the Lord," so often mentioned in the Old Testament, and God's agent in all his dispensations, and sometimes, therefore, called God, or a god: but, nevertheless, a distinct being from God, and a derived and dependent being.

On the trinitarian hypothesis, how can God be said to be "with God," unless there are two Gods? How can "all things" be said to have been made or done by one person of the trinity, unless we suppose that nothing, absolutely nothing, was made or done by either of the other two? Does this accord with our Saviour's declaration, who says of his FATHER, or the first person in the trinity, "HE doeth the works." If the three persons in the trinity were, nevertheless, but one being, how could one of these persons be "made flesh," unless the whole being was "made flesh"? Answer us, who can.